

## CLAIMS

I (we) claim:

1           1. In a public computer network connecting a buyer organization and at  
2 least first and second supplier computers associated respectively with first and second  
3 suppliers and each having a browser, wherein the first and second supplier computers are  
4 coupled to a set of one or more server computers associated with the buyer organization over  
5 the public computer network, a method comprising:  
6

7                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, providing a  
8 supplier selection electronic form, wherein the supplier selection electronic form includes a  
9 search and retrieve supplier record input field for retrieving from a database of supplier  
10 records, and add supplier input fields for receiving data for creating a new supplier record;

11                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, receiving data  
12 input provided to the supplier selection electronic form, including input to the retrieve  
13 supplier record field to retrieve a first supplier record, and input to the add supplier input  
14 fields to create a second supplier record, wherein the first and second supplier records  
15 correspond to first and second suppliers proposed for inclusion in a new reverse auction to  
procure an identified item;

16                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, electronically  
17 providing to individuals in the buyer organization a displayable document that provides  
18 notification of the new reverse auction and lists the first and second proposed suppliers for  
19 approval;

20                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, receiving input  
21 from at least one individual in the buyer organization that the first and second suppliers are  
22 approved for participating in the new reverse auction; and

23                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, electronically  
24 distributing new auction information to first and second supplier computers over the public  
25 computer network after receiving the approval.

1           2.     The method of claim 1 wherein the public computer network is the  
2 World Wide Web, wherein the browser is a web browser,

3                 wherein the supplier selection electronic form is a web page form stored in a  
4 central database coupled to at least one server computer in the set of server computers;

5                 wherein the supplier selection electronic form includes a retrieve supplier  
6 record by supplier number input field and a retrieve supplier record by supplier name input  
7 field, and wherein the add supplier input fields include a supplier name field, geographic  
8 pole field, country field, contact name field, contact phone number field, contact email field,  
9 at least one supplier approval field, prior business experience field and at least one field for  
10 identifying items capable of being supplied;

11                 wherein receiving input from at least one individual in the buyer organization  
12 includes receiving approval from an auction owner that the first and second suppliers are  
13 approved for participating in the new reverse auction, receiving approval from a geographic  
14 pole representative that the first and second suppliers have sufficiently completed a self  
15 assessment paper, and receiving approval from a quality assurance individual that the first  
16 and second suppliers executed secrecy or intellectual property protection agreements; and

17                 wherein at least one server computer in the set of server computers employs  
18 logic to prohibit the first or second suppliers from participating in the new reverse auction if  
19 the approvals from the auction owner, pole representative and quality assurance individual  
20 are not received.

1           3.     A system for facilitating procurement of an item under an auction from  
2 one of at least first and second suppliers, the system comprising:

3                 at least one server computer, wherein the server computer is operable:

4                 to provide at least one supplier selection electronic form, wherein the at  
5 least one supplier selection electronic form includes a retrieve supplier data input field  
6 for retrieving supplier data, and at least two add supplier input fields for receiving  
7 data regarding a new supplier;

8                 to receive input data provided to the at least one supplier selection  
9 electronic form, including data input to either the retrieve supplier data field to  
10 retrieve first supplier data, or input to the add supplier input fields to add second

11 supplier data, wherein the first supplier data and the second supplier data correspond  
12 respectively to the first and second suppliers, and wherein the received input data  
13 proposes the first or second supplier for inclusion in a new auction to procure an  
14 identified item; and

15 to electronically notify at least one individual of the first and second  
16 suppliers for approval to participate in the new auction, before conducting the new  
17 auction.

1           4. The system of claim 3 wherein a public computer network couples the  
2 server computer with at least a buyer computer, associated with a buyer organization, and at  
3 least first and second supplier computers, associated respectively with the first and second  
4 suppliers, and wherein the server computer includes a database coupled thereto, wherein the  
5 at least one supplier selection electronic form is a display description stored in the database,  
6 and wherein the database centrally stores supplier records for previously approved suppliers;

7           wherein the at least one supplier selection electronic form includes a retrieve  
8 supplier record by supplier number input field and a retrieve supplier record by supplier  
9 name input field, and wherein the add supplier input fields include at least two fields selected  
10 from a field set of: a supplier name field, geographic pole field, country field, contact name  
11 field, contact phone number field, contact email field, at least one supplier approval field,  
12 prior business experience field, and at least one field for identifying items capable of being  
13 supplied;

14           wherein the server computer is operable:

15           to receive input from an auction owner or buyer that at least one of the  
16 first and second suppliers are approved for participating in a new reverse auction, and  
17 receiving input and approval from a geographic pole representative that at least one of  
18 the first or second suppliers have sufficiently completed a self assessment or from a  
19 quality assurance individual that at least one of the first or second suppliers executed  
20 protection agreements; and

21           to electronically distribute new auction information to at least one of the  
22 first and second supplier computers over the public computer network after receiving  
23 the approval from the auction owner or buyer and the pole representative or quality  
24 assurance individual.

1           5. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is coupled to a  
2 database and the World Wide Web;

3                 wherein the at least one supplier selection electronic form is a web page form  
4 stored in a central database coupled to the server computer;

5                 wherein the retrieve supplier data field to retrieve first supplier data retrieves  
6 data regarding the first supplier, including at least one supplier approval field, prior business  
7 experience field or at least one field for identifying items capable of being supplied; and

8                 wherein electronically notify at least one individual includes providing a Web  
9 page document that provides notification of a new reverse auction, lists the first and second  
10 proposed suppliers for approval, and provides approval input fields for at least an auction  
11 owner and a commodity expert.

12           6. The system of claim 3 wherein the at least one supplier selection  
13 electronic form includes a retrieve supplier record by supplier number input field and a  
14 retrieve supplier record by supplier name input field.

15           7. The system of claim 3 wherein the add supplier input fields include at  
16 least two fields selected from a field set of: a supplier name field, geographic pole field,  
17 country field, contact name field, contact phone number field, contact email field, at least  
18 one supplier approval field, prior business experience field, and at least one field for  
19 identifying items capable of being supplied.

20           8. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further operable:  
21                 to receive input from an auction owner or buyer that at least one of the first and  
22 second suppliers are approved for participating in the new reverse auction, and receiving  
23 input and approval from a geographic pole representative that at least one of the first or  
24 second suppliers have sufficiently completed a self assessment or from a quality assurance  
25 individual that at least one of the first or second suppliers executed protection agreements.

1           9.     The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is operable:  
2                 to electronically distribute new auction information to at least one of the first  
3     and second supplier computers over the public computer network after receiving approval  
4     from an auction owner, buyer, geographic pole representative or quality assurance individual.

1           10.    The system of claim 3 wherein electronically notify at least one  
2     individual includes providing a Web page document that provides notification of the new  
3     auction, lists the first and second proposed suppliers for approval, and provides approval  
4     input fields for at least an auction owner or a commodity expert.

1           11.    The system of claim 3 wherein the retrieve supplier data field to retrieve  
2     first supplier data retrieves data regarding the first supplier, including at least one supplier  
3     approval field, prior business experience field or at least one field for identifying items  
4     capable of being supplied.

1           12.    The system of claim 3 wherein electronically notifying includes sending  
2     first and second electronic mail messages to first and second individuals and storing at least  
3     one electronic document at a network location, wherein the electronic document may be  
4     accessed by a remote computer via a public computer network.

1           13.    The system of claim 3 wherein electronically notifying includes sending  
2     at least one electronic mail messages to first and second individuals.

1           14.    The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further operable  
2     to prohibit the first or second suppliers from participating in the reverse auction if the  
3     approval is not received.

1           15.    The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further operable  
2     to provide automatic supplier approval after a select time period passes without receiving  
3     approval from the at least one individual.

1           16. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computer system  
2 to assist in procuring an item from one of at least first and second suppliers, by:

3                 providing at least one supplier selection electronic form, wherein the at least  
4 one supplier selection electronic form includes a retrieve supplier data input field for  
5 retrieving supplier data, and at least two add supplier input fields for receiving data regarding  
6 a new supplier;

7                 receiving information provided to the at least one supplier selection electronic  
8 form, including data input to either the retrieve supplier data field to retrieve first supplier  
9 data, or input to the add supplier input fields to add second supplier data, wherein the first  
10 supplier data and the second supplier data correspond respectively to the first and second  
11 suppliers, and wherein the received input data proposes the first or second supplier for  
12 inclusion in a new reverse auction to procure an identified item; and

13                 before the auction, electronically notifying at least one individual of the first  
14 and second suppliers for approval to participate in the new auction.

1           17. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the at least one  
2 supplier selection electronic form includes a retrieve supplier record by supplier number  
3 input field and a retrieve supplier record by supplier name input field.

1           18. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the add supplier  
2 input fields include at least two fields selected from a field set of: a supplier name field,  
3 geographic pole field, country field, contact name field, contact phone number field, contact  
4 email field, at least one supplier approval field, prior business experience field, and at least  
5 one field for identifying items capable of being supplied.

1           19. The computer-readable medium of claim 16, further comprising  
2 receiving input from an auction owner or buyer that at least one of the first and second  
3 suppliers are approved for participating in the new reverse auction, and receiving input and  
4 approval from a geographic pole representative that at least one of the first or second  
5 suppliers have sufficiently completed a self assessment or from a quality assurance  
6 individual that at least one of the first or second suppliers executed protection agreements.

1           20. The computer-readable medium of claim 16, further comprising  
2 electronically distributing new auction information to at least one of the first and second  
3 supplier computers over the public computer network after receiving approval from an  
4 auction owner, buyer, geographic pole representative or quality assurance individual.

1           21. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein electronically  
2 notifying at least one individual includes providing a Web page document that provides  
3 notification of the new auction, lists the first and second proposed suppliers for approval, and  
4 provides approval input fields for at least an auction owner or a commodity expert.

1           22. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the retrieve  
2 supplier data field to retrieve first supplier data retrieves data regarding the first supplier,  
3 including at least one supplier approval field, prior business experience field or at least one  
field for identifying items capable of being supplied.

1           23. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein electronically  
2 notifying includes sending at least one electronic mail messages to first and second  
3 individuals.

1           24. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a logical node in a computer network receiving the contents.

1           25. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a computer-readable disk.

1           26. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a data transmission medium transmitting a generated data signal  
3 containing the contents.

1           27. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a memory of a computer system.

1           28. A computer-readable medium containing a data structure having  
2 information for display and to assist in procuring an item from one of at least first and second  
3 suppliers under an auction, the information comprising:

4                 a display description defining at least one supplier selection electronic form for  
5 identifying suppliers for participating in a new auction with respect to the item to procure,  
6 wherein the display description comprises at least first and second data input portions,  
7 wherein the first data input portion corresponds to a retrieve supplier data input portion for  
8 retrieving supplier data, and the second data input portion corresponds to at least two add  
9 supplier input portions for receiving data regarding a new supplier.

1           29. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the retrieve  
2 supplier data input portion includes a retrieve supplier record by supplier number input field  
3 and a retrieve supplier record by supplier name input field, and wherein the at least two add  
4 supplier input portions include at least two fields selected from a field set of: a supplier name  
5 field, geographic pole field, country field, contact name field, contact phone number field,  
6 contact email field, at least one supplier approval field, prior business experience field, and  
7 at least one field for identifying items capable of being supplied.

1           30. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 includes instructions for the display of the information.

1           31. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 represents a Web page.

1           32. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 represents a document for display.

1           33. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 is a data transmission medium transmitting a generated data signal containing the data  
3 structure.

1           34. A system to assist in procuring items from one of at least first and  
2 second suppliers, comprising:

3                 means for providing at least one supplier selection electronic form, wherein the  
4 at least one supplier selection electronic form includes a retrieve supplier data input field for  
5 retrieving supplier data, and at least two add supplier input fields for receiving data regarding  
6 a new supplier;

7                 means for receiving information provided to the at least one supplier selection  
8 electronic form, including data input to either the retrieve supplier data field to retrieve first  
9 supplier data, or input to the add supplier input fields to add second supplier data, wherein  
10 the first supplier data and the second supplier data correspond respectively to the first and  
11 second suppliers, and wherein the received input data proposes the first or second supplier  
12 for inclusion in a new reverse auction to procure an identified item; and

13                 before the auction, means, coupled to the means for providing and the means  
14 for receiving, for electronically notifying at least one individual of the first and second  
15 suppliers for approval to participate in the new auction.

16           35. The system of claim 34, further comprising:

17                 means for receiving input from an auction owner or buyer that at least one of  
18 the first and second suppliers are approved for participating in a new reverse auction, and  
19 receiving input and approval from a geographic pole representative that at least one of the  
20 first or second suppliers have sufficiently completed a self assessment or from a quality  
21 assurance individual that at least one of the first or second suppliers executed protection  
22 agreements; and

23                 means for electronically distributing new auction information to at least one of  
24 the first and second supplier computers over the public computer network after receiving the  
25 approval from the auction owner or buyer and the pole representative or quality assurance  
26 individual.